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STATE FOR WHA A/S SHANNON, PDAS SHAPIRO, AND DAS DUDDY
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD BARBARA MOORE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: VICE PRESIDENT ASKS CHARGE TO DELAY
VISIT BY GENERAL CRADDOCK

1. (SBU) Vice President Castiglioni (Acting President and our strongest supporter within the GOP) asked Charge directly 11/2 to delay visit by General Craddock until after the Colorado internal elections February 19, 2006.

2. (SBU) Castiglioni said the current atmosphere in Paraguay and the region would lead the visit (at this time) to be a net minus for US-Paraguay relations, adding to anti-US sentiment and fueling attacks on pro-US politicians both within the Colorado party and from outside (such as the anti-US President of Congress). This is due to the cumulative effect of high-level visits, the surprise emergence of a strong opponent to President Duarte in internal Colorado elections, and the disinformation campaign about the USG's alleged plans to establish military bases in Paraguay, steal water from the Guarani aquifer, use a planned new FBI office in Asuncion to spy on the region, etc. Castiglioni was not/not alarmist on this score at all, but clearly said it would be better to wait.

3. (SBU) Due to the above, and other regional considerations (Bolivian elections, symbolism of Combatant Commander visiting ONLY Paraguay within South America on this trip, etc.), Post favors delaying the visit and having the stop here included in visits to other countries in the region, if possible.

4. (SBU) However, if Department so instructs, Post believes we can convince the GOP to accept the Combatant Commander's visit in December as planned, or in January if Department wishes to address the Bolivia angle but not the Paraguay one. If so, due to the problematical timing of the visit, Post requests:

-- visit be low key and appointments no higher than MOD;

-- visit be restricted to Asuncion (currently plans to go to Tri-Border Area (TBA) and see Itaipu Dam, which would fuel flames of US military designs on that region, strengthen conspiracy theories, irritate Brazil and thus expose pro-US players within GOP to internal attacks);

-- visit be portrayed to press as routine and that it not/not publicly emphasize counter-terrorism or TBA.

5. (SBU) Post requests Department guidance on how to proceed. Post will make work whichever path Washington selects.
JOHNSON